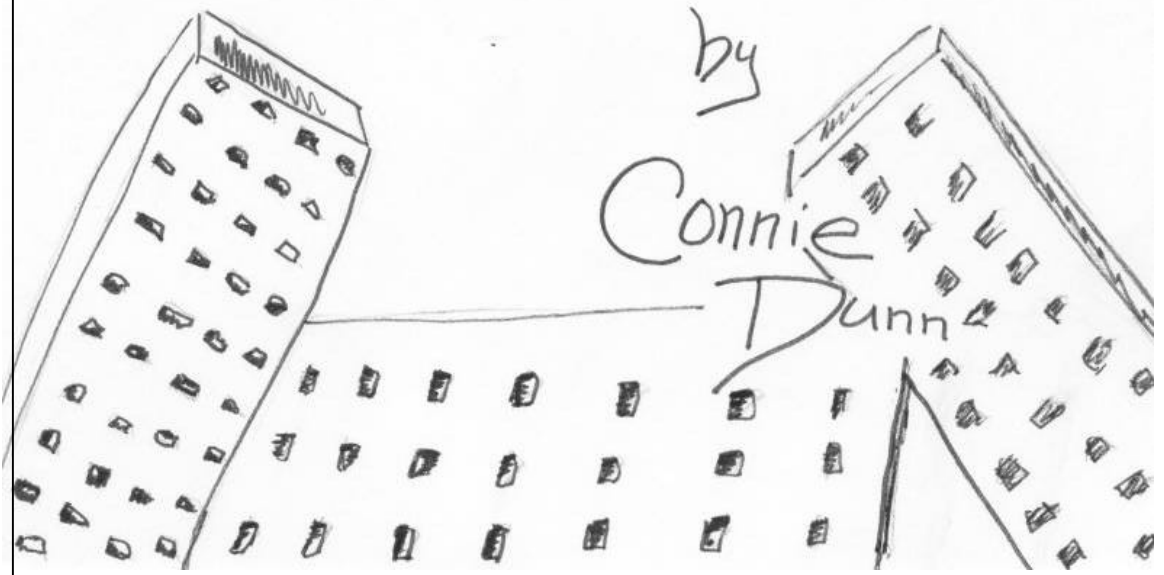


WHEN BUILDINGS FELL



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When the Buildings Fell

For UUs

For all the children everywhere

For Amy, Rev. Don Fielding, Rev. Lillie Henley and other religious professionals

For Michelle, Sam and Erin

For Sierra, Skyler and Nicolas

Thanks to Si



On September 11, 2001, the New York skyline forever changed. It was the worst day of my life.

On August 19, my Uncle Max, who lives in Saint Louis, had given me a wonderful tenth birthday present. It was a small, black terrier puppy.

Uncle Max said, "Take good care of your puppy, Will."

I promised that I would.

I named the puppy, Max, after my uncle. I took him walking every day in Battery Park with my mom. Battery Park was near our high-rise apartment building. My mom worked on Wall Street, so it was close to where she worked. Battery Park looks out over the harbor to the Statue of Liberty.

I loved my dog more than anything else in the world, even more than my baseball glove or the Mickey Mantle-autographed baseball that my Uncle Max gave me.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, a plane crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. Not long afterward, a second plane crashed into the towers. And the towers came crashing down. It crashed my life and the life of my friend, Jack, as well.

Jack's dad worked in the World Trade Center. His dad was never found and was believed to have been killed when the building crashed. Jack and his mom moved to Illinois to live with his grandmother.

My personal tragedy came shortly after my mom picked me up from school. I was glad to see her, because she worked on Wall Street not far from the Twin Towers. I was worried, but she was okay.

Our apartments were close to the towers. In fact, all of the windows blew out of the building when the towers exploded. And when fire rained down from the debris of the towers, my apartments were burned.



We couldn't get to our apartment that night. I was a wreck, because I wanted to see if Max was okay or not. We went down as far as we could, but the firemen would not let us pass.

One fireman with kind eyes said, "I'm sorry, son, but your dog is probably dead. The apartments have burned."

To my mother, he said, "Everything down there is on fire or has burned to the ground. And more may go yet. We've got some gas leaks, as well. It's just not safe. Go to the other end of Manhattan...as far away as you can get. We don't know what else will go!"

Max was burned up in the fire along with my baseball mitt and my Mickey Mantle baseball.

Many people we knew did not survive the Twin Towers crash. As I look back, I know how sad we were. We walked around like robots with a lot of other people. There were lots of people who had nowhere to go just like us.

Some people we didn't even know asked if we needed a place to spend the night. They cooked us food and let us sleep in their apartment. The Jordans turned out to be good friends.

That first night, I woke up crying. Ms. Jordan said, "You're okay, Will. You're okay." And she held me.

When I told her about Max, she and her son, Daniel, cried with me.

Ms. Jordan told me that my memories of Max will keep him alive forever in my heart. I told her that I had only had Max for about three weeks. She assured me that those had to be Max's best days of life.



We stayed with the Jordans for several months, since we couldn't return to our apartment. They didn't seem to mind. We did lots of things with them, such as attend the Unitarian Universalist church. Ms. Jordan helped me create a memorial service for Max. Daniel rounded up some of the kids in the neighborhood. We went to their church and participated in a memorial service for all the people who died or were still missing.

When we got to the church, the minister lit a chalice. From the chalice flame, many people lit candles to remember someone. I walked with my mother to the front of the church. She lit one for Jack's dad. I lit a candle for Max.

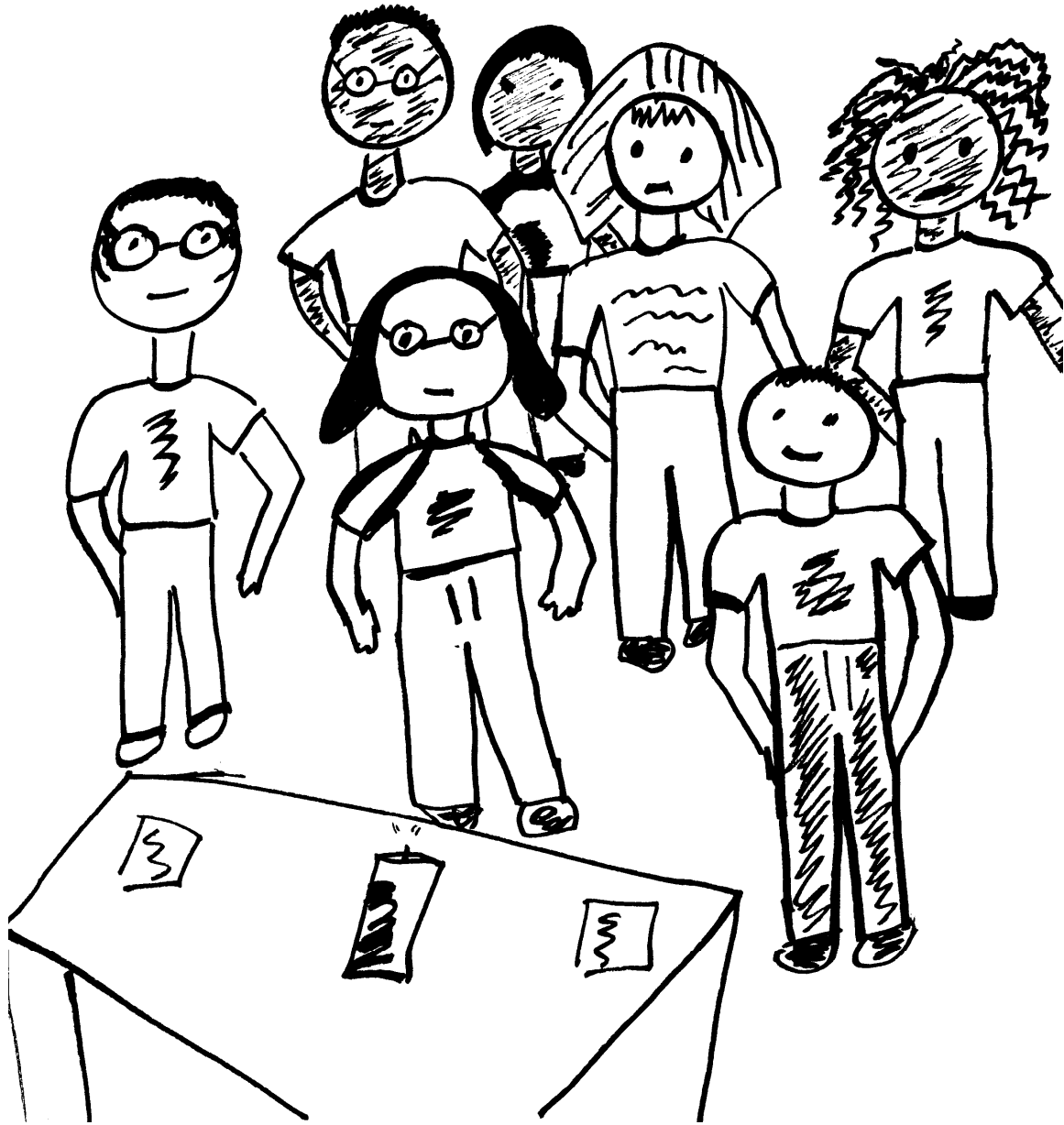


We stayed with the Jordans until we got our own place with furniture, clothes and other stuff. And though we had lost a lot, my mom and I realized that we had also gained a lot, such as new friends and a new church community.

We began going to the Unitarian Universalist church regularly. When I learned the Principles and Purposes, like "the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the goal of world peace." I knew this was the church for me.

Last week, my friend, Brian, was very sad. His dog, Cindy, died. I told him that we could do a memorial service. I taught him what Ms. Jordan had taught me.

That made me realize: now, I know that the memories of Max really live inside my heart. I also have the memories of Jack's dad. He took Jack and me to the zoo often. And there are memories of people with no names. I used to see them at the World Trade Center every time my mom and I shopped.



It makes me sad. But, now, I know that it's okay to be sad. We take flowers or dog biscuits and toys to the site to add to the collection of flowers, wreaths, toys, stuffed animals and other things people have placed there.

Whenever I visit the site, I remember Max. But I'm a boy with lots of things to do. If I don't think about Max for days or weeks, it's okay. I still keep his memory in my heart forever.

I don't have to put flowers or dog biscuits at the site to remember Max. Someday when I feel even better, I'll get another dog. I know it won't be Max, but still, when you're a guy, having a dog is like having a best friend. And I need a best friend.

THE END